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## **How Citizens Attribute Blame for Electoral Violence: Regional Differences and Party Identification in Turkey**

**ABSTRACT:** Recent work on elections in unconsolidated democracies and electoral authoritarian states has identified violence a problem that commonly afflicts electoral processes. Yet there is as yet little understanding of citizen reactions to violent acts and how voters attribute blame for attacks, intimidation, forceful obstruction of campaign activities and other violations of electoral peace. This paper aims to add to the growing micro-level literature on the dynamics of electoral violence by providing evidence of factors that shape regional heterogeneity in reactions to this phenomenon. Taking as our frame of reference the 2018 Turkish presidential elections, we probe the role of party identification and region of residence in conditioning blame attribution, separately and in combination. We find that the process of blame attribution is shaped by party identification, but that this effect is highly dependent on the regional context.

## **How Citizens Attribute Blame for Electoral Violence: Regional Differences and Party Identification in Turkey**

Violence is a phenomenon that is coming to be salient in a wide range of electoral contexts, yet we have as yet scant understanding of how citizens attribute blame for violent acts.

Most incidents of electoral violence are carried out covertly in the aim of affecting electoral competition but hiding the identity of those who perpetrate such acts. The impact of violence on citizen electoral behaviour can be expected to be primarily shaped by the attributions of responsibility they make, which will, in turn, affect the choices they opt for on polling day.

This paper focuses on the first of these puzzles – the process of blame attribution for electoral violence. Taking as our frame of reference the 2018 Turkish parliamentary and presidential elections, we probe the role of party identification and region of residence in conditioning blame attribution, separately and in combination. We find that the process of blame attribution is shaped by party identification, but that this effect is highly dependent on the regional context.

Electoral violence in contemporary Turkey is an understudied topic, and the attribution of blame for violent acts is more understudied still. Turkish electoral studies focus primarily on the factors shaping vote choice, whereas the vast majority of the academic research on electoral violence has focused on sub-Saharan Africa, while little systematic attention has been devoted to this phenomenon in the Middle East. The evidence that exists suggests that this is not because Middle Eastern elections do not experience violence; on the contrary, many Middle Eastern countries experience relatively high levels of violence at election time (Birch and Muchlinski 2017) Yet the relatively higher levels of economic development, state capacity and ethnic homogeneity in many Middle Eastern states means that the dynamics of electoral violence and blame for violence can be expected to take different forms there from the forms they most commonly take in Africa. Specifically, we can expect discourses of violence and violence blame to play more prominent roles in shaping the

cultural role of violence in contexts where conflict and cooperation operate side by side, and where violence ranges from relatively subtle acts of familial electoral coercion to blatant attacks. Gaining a better understanding of the specific features of electoral violence and violence blame in this region is thus an urgent task for researchers as part of the broader objective of understanding democratic accountability. Though this paper does not address electoral accountability per se, it sheds light on how political actors in Turkey act strategically to hold each other to account for acts of violence in connection with the electoral process.

This paper makes three principal contributions. The primary contribution of the paper is to probe individual-level perceptions of electoral violence and attributions of blame. Research is only just beginning to discern the correlates of individual-level attitudes on and views about the origins and consequences of violence at election time. As the attempted pipe bombings in advance of the 2018 US midterm-elections attest (Pilkington 2018), violent acts can be interpreted very differently by different people. In as much as perceptions and attitudes mediate reactions to electoral violence and the influence of violence on electoral and other behavior, it is essential to have a better understanding of how people process and react to the information they receive about violence and potential violence. The paper's second contribution is to provide evidence of the factors that shape regional heterogeneity in reactions to electoral violence across a country. Turkey is one of several prominent cases where electoral violence tends to cluster in specific parts of the country, while other areas are largely peaceful throughout the electoral process and political parties coexist in relatively conventional democratic ways, and the analyses in this paper help to explain why that may be the case in Turkey and what implication this has for citizen responses to violent acts. The third aim of the paper is to add to the growing micro-level literature on the dynamics of electoral violence by enhancing our understanding of blame attribution. Electoral violence is

a complex and heterogeneous phenomenon that varies considerably across states and over time. Gathering together evidence from different parts of the world, scholars are only now beginning to piece together patterns and trends that will make it possible to set out the ‘big picture’ of electoral violence in comparative perspective. So far, Turkey has represented a lacuna in studies of this topic, as there have been few studies specifically devoted to the role of violence assessments in shaping Turkish electoral processes (Toros and Birch 2019), and this paper helps to fill that gap.

The paper is structured as follows: the next section details our theoretical framework and elaborates our hypotheses based on the specific features of the Turkish context. The second section describes the data and methods we use to test these hypotheses. Our empirical results are presented in the third section of the paper, while the final section discusses these findings and concludes.

### **1. Theoretical Perspectives on Blame Attribution for Electoral Violence in Turkey**

Competitive multiparty elections are often held to be a hallmark of democracy, but elections only successfully embody democratic ideals if they reflect norms of impartial conduct, fair campaigning and peaceful competition. As competitive elections have become established in the political architecture of more and more states across the world, these norms are too often violated. The result is electoral processes marred by fraud, manipulation and conflict. In some cases, the victims of violent acts are those who have chosen to engage actively in the electoral process, such as candidates and activists, but often those harmed in violent elections are ordinary voters.

Any detailed discussion of understandings of electoral violence must start by defining the term, which described a phenomenon that sits at the borders of comparative politics and

conflict studies. Electoral violence is a sub-type of political violence, but it is also a sub-type of electoral misconduct. For the purpose of this analysis, we define electoral violence as coercive force directed towards electoral actors and/or objects during electoral processes. It is worth noting that this definition assumes that violence that occurs in the context of an election will have some effect on the electoral process and/or that the electoral process will in some way affect the perpetration of political violence during that period. Following other scholars (Birch and Muchlinski 2020; Daxecker 2014), we believe this is a reasonable assumption to make.

The study of electoral violence has burgeoned in recent years. We now have a good understanding of the aggregate-level factors associated with this phenomenon, including regime type, ethnic conflict, competitiveness, the presence of observers and informal and formal institutions (e.g. Asunka et al. 2017; Bhasin and Gandhi 2013; Birch 2020; Burchard 2015; Collier and Vicente 2012; 2014; Daxecker 2012; 2014; Hafner-Burton, Hyde and Jablonski 2014; van Ham and Lindberg 2015; Höglund and Fjelde 2016; Klaus and Mitchell 2015; Salehyan and Linebarger 2015; Wilkinson 2004). Yet despite the recent proliferation of research on this topic, there has been very little research on individual-level perceptions of electoral violence and very little research on the attribution of blame for violent acts. Individual-level studies of electoral violence have probed citizen fears that elections might be violent; a common theme in these perceptual studies is that poor and otherwise under-privileged groups are most likely to fear being targeted by electoral violence (Bratton 2008; Burchard 2015; 2018; Dercon and Gutiérrez-Romero 2012; Gonzalez-Ocantos et al. 2018; Mares and Young 2016). There is also some indication of a relationship between the strength of partisanship and fear of violence; Gutiérrez-Romero and LeBas find in the Kenyan case that strong partisans are more likely to fear being targeted by violence (Gutiérrez-Romero and LeBas 2018). Finally, there is evidence to suggest that fear of electoral violence is associated

with lower levels of trust and democratic satisfaction, at least in the African context (Burchard 2015; Dercon and Gutierrez-Romero 2012); and little indication that under most conditions fear of electoral violence enhances levels of political knowledge, as would be predicted by Affective Intelligence Theory (Söderström 2017). Though these studies attest to growing understanding of electoral violence perceptions, individual-level studies of how people attribute blame for electoral violence are sparse. In a study that marks an important exception to this generalisation, Dercon and Gutierrez-Romero (2012) report that Kenyan citizens hold partisan actors accountable for election-related violence, and see electoral fraud as having been a major trigger event, yet these authors report survey frequencies only, and they do not probe the determinants of blame attribution.

We seek in this paper to fill this gap. We argue that two factors play important roles in conditioning attributions of blame for violent acts at election time: partisanship and local context. The role of political party elites in ‘mobilising bias’ (Schattschneider 1975) is well established. Moreover, several theoretical approaches, including social identity theory and ethnic competition theory, analyse the dynamics of ingroup and outgroup activities of different ethnic groups. While social identity theory has produced evidence on the impact of the intergroup contact on limiting the prejudice and hostility to outgroup members (Frølund Thomsen 2012; Bağcı, Çelebi, and Karaköse 2017; Hindriks, Verkuyten, and Coenders 2014; Hogg 2006), ethnic competition theory expects that processes of competition among ethnic groups are more likely to produce ethnic mobilisation, tensions, and conflicts (Sarigil 2018b; Sarigil and Karakoc 2017) which, we argue, is the case for Turkey. As Sarigil (2018a, 105–7) discusses, a significant area of conflict in the Turkish context was in the domain of electoral politics. Although during the 1990s pro-Kurdish parties were popular, starting from early 2000s the electoral popularity of pro-Islamic and conservative parties like the Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi (Justice and Development Party, AKP) increased in the region, resulting in

a polarised voter base among the Kurdish population (Sarigil 2018a, 105). Bias against outgroups is a common factor in political competition and a frequent determinant of party affiliation in multiethnic societies (Horowitz 1985; Tilly 2004). In line with the above theoretical work, we argue that partisanship shapes citizen's interpretation of violent acts that occur during an electoral cycle; partisans are more likely to attribute blame to other parties than are the non-aligned. Moreover, we should expect this effect to be enhanced in the areas where ethnic tensions are rife.

We also argue that local context matters. Turkey is a country in which electoral violence and attributions of blame for violence take on a distinct regional dimension. The regional dimension of electoral violence has always been the focus of some recent literature on the topic, suggesting that violence tends to cluster in regions for two reasons; uneven state capacity in some countries leaves certain regions effectively ungoverned by the central state and rules instead by organised criminal groups or local warlords. Examples of this phenomenon are Afghanistan, Honduras, Indonesia, Italy, Nigeria and Paraguay, and (Alesina, Piccolo and Pinotti 2016; Harish and Toha 2017; Mignozetti and Sexton 2018; Murray 2016; Reno 2011). The second context in which electoral violence tends to cluster, and the context more relevant to Turkey, is the context of ethnic strife; areas where there have historically been tensions between groups over rights are more prone to violence. We observe this, for example, in Ethiopia, India, Kenya and Sri Lanka (Dercon and Gutierrez-Romero 2012; Gutierrez-Romero 2014; Höglund and Piyarathne 2009; Tronvoll and Hagmann 2012; Wilkinson 2004).

In the Turkish context, it is the Eastern and South Eastern Anatolian region, where the Kurdish ethnic minority is highly concentrated, that has historically been most prone to violence of various types, including electoral violence. Although the area has experienced extreme ideological polarisation and political violence since the 1970s, since the early 2000s



the Kurdish population has been politically polarised along two competing lines of pro-Kurdish political parties and, AKP (Sarigil 2018b). Beyond such historical legacies and memories, the majority of Kurdish voters have voted for leftist, pro-Kurdish political parties in the last four general elections. Additionally, this is an underdeveloped region with a string Kurdish population that has historically advanced separatist claims, and has more recently focused on securing ethnic rights within the context of Turkish state institutions. The main political vehicle for the ethnic Kurdish population is the Halkların Demokratik Partisi (People's Democratic Party, HDP), which is closely aligned with the Kurdish ethnic group.

When considering the regional aspects of Turkish politics, one invariably has to come to terms with what is often referred to in Turkish Political discourse as the 'Kurdish question' (Toros 2002). This is due to the regional concentration of ethnic Kurds in East and South East Anatolia (ESEA). The multi-dimensional and multi-layered Kurdish question has always been a central issue for Turkish politics. It is multi-dimensional in the sense that it touches the areas of economic, social, and political spheres. It is multi-layered in the sense that it has experienced different solutions during different historical periods which has been cumulated through the years (Yeğen 2006; M. Gunter 1997; M. M. Gunter 2004; Heper 2007; Kuzu 2016; Sarigil and Karakoc 2016) Starting with the 2000s, the significance of the issue elevated again, especially with its reference to democratisation (Özbudun 2000) Most research on the 'Kurdish question' has focused on the economic aspects of the topic, and in particular the relative deprivation that affects many Kurdish-populated regions. However, uneven development also manifests itself in political terms, and this has consequences for electoral politics. In this region, ethnic tensions are heightened by historic conflicts, and we expect that these tensions should accentuate the effect of partisanship on the attribution of blame for electoral violence. In other words, historic ethnic tensions in the region should

condition blame attribution by heightening the tendency to blame outgroups for acts of violence that occurs in connection with electoral processes.

We thus posit two specific hypotheses:

*H1: Partisanship provides political group identity that shapes blame attribution, causing partisans to blame political outgroups for electoral violence.*

*H2: In regions which Kurdish population is dense (such as Turkish East and South East Anatolia), the phenomenon of partisan-shaped blame attribution is magnified.*

Turkey is a particularly good setting in which to test hypotheses about electoral violence blame attribution, as elections have become increasingly violent in recent years and attribution of blame is a growing issue. Turkey has a long history of holding elections, which have taken place since 1950. For several decades Turkish elections were relatively peaceful and attained relatively high levels of electoral integrity. Over the course of the past decade, however, democracy in Turkey has faltered; the exercise of civil and political liberties has been restricted, and political violence has increased, including electoral violence. During this period, analyses of the voting process have yielded a slew of complaints about misconduct; these include, in particular, reports of voter intimidation, violent attacks on candidates and electoral materials and the obstruction of domestic election observation (Akkoyunlu 2017; EPDE 2017; Toros and Birch 2018). These developments have taken place under the presidency of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and the ruling Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi (Justice and Development Party, AKP) party, which came to power in 2002. Since that time, Erdoğan has gradually tightened his grip on Turkish politics and strengthened the powers of the presidency. A referendum held in 2017 approved 18 constitutional amendments, including

the abolition of the post of prime minister and the establishment of Turkey as a pure presidential system, with enhanced executive powers for the presidency as well as increased presidential control over the judiciary.

Erdoğan, who had served as prime minister from 2003 to 2014, was elected president in 2014. His term was meant to run until 2019, however he decided in early 2018 to call pre-term presidential and parliamentary elections. Although the election was originally set for November 2019, the elections were rescheduled to June 2018 following a joint proposal by the AKP and the MHP parties. On June 24 2018 Turkish citizens thus went to the ballot box for the fourth time in five years to vote in the first election to be held under the new presidential system which was ratified by the 2017 constitutional referendum.

Ten parties and six presidential candidates participated in the elections. The new electoral law permitted alliances, allowing a joint count of votes for allied parties surpassing the ten percent threshold. Eventually, two alliances formed under the names of the People's Alliance and the Nation's Alliance. The People's Alliance consisted of the AKP, MHP; the Nation's Alliance included the CHP, İYİ, and Saadet Partisi (Felicity Party, SP). The HDP ran unallied.

The result was the re-election of Erdoğan on a majority of 52.59 per cent (up from 51.79 per cent in 2014) but loss of the AKP's majority in parliament, though it still held a majority in alliance with its partner the ultra-nationalist Milli Hareket Partisi (Nationalist Action Party, MHP). Thus, along with the 2015 June elections where the AKP could not manage to form a single party government, the 2018 elections were the most competitive polls that the president and the ruling party had faced in recent years.

The 2018 election also marked a point when violence came to play a more prominent role in Turkish politics. Just before the declaration of early elections, the government extended the state-of-emergency laws for the seventh time after the 2016 coup attempt and

the elections took place under these state of emergency rules. In the months preceding the election, several developments set the stage for increased violence, especially in the ethnically mixed Kurdish-Turkish area of East and South East Anatolia. First, the Turkish military had been fighting Kurdish militias in the Syrian province of Afrin across the border from ESEA, and in March it captured the area. Second, press repression in Turkey increased during in the first half of 2018, and at this point Turkey held over 100 journalists in jail and in February 800 people were detained for protesting on social media against Turkish aggression in Syria (*Economist* 2018a; 2018b; 2018c). A third shift was an increase in media ownership by people favorably disposed to president Erdoğan, with the announcement in March of the sale of major independent news conglomerate Dogan group to someone alleged to be willing to bow to the president's wishes (*Economist* 2018b). A fourth relevant development was the increased obstruction of civil society, and especially domestic election observation groups, in the run-up to the election. Election observation by nonpartisan groups had been practiced in Turkey since 2011, but the rights of such groups had eroded in the 2014-2017 period (EPDE 2017), and requests for observer accreditation by civil society organisations were rejected by electoral authorities (OSCE 2018). A final factor that is relevant in the context of the current analysis is the key role of the Kurdish-backed HDP party in determining the balance of power that would result from the electoral context. In advance of the polls it was predicted that were the HDP to clear the 10 per cent threshold for representation (which the party did in the end accomplish), this would make it harder for the AKP to hold onto its parliamentary majority; a strong vote for the HDP presidential candidate was also expected to reduce the chances of Erdoğan winning that contest (*Economist* 2018d).

Throughout the campaign period the tone of the political parties and candidates was extremely confrontational. The incumbent president blamed other candidates and parties for being supporters of terrorism. On 6 June in Muğla, Erdoğan referred to the HDP's

presidential candidate Selahattin Demirtaş as a terrorist, and to the CHP presidential candidate Muharrem İnce as a supporter of terrorism. On 8 June in Karabük, İnce accused the president of supporting terrorists. On 28 May, the incumbent president launched a criminal complaint and a civil lawsuit against the CHP candidate for statements he made in a campaign speech; on 9 June, the CHP candidate filed a lawsuit against the incumbent for slander and grave insult (OSCE 2018: 9). During the campaign also a number of violent incidents took place. A significant number of attacks on party and campaign premises mainly affected the opposition parties and CHP, HDP, Felicity and İYİ Party reported several attacks on their offices, vehicles and electoral materials coupled with hindrances of meetings in Adana, Ankara, Bolu, Bursa, Diyarbakir, Erzurum, Gaziantep, Istanbul, Izmir, Kocaeli, Konya, Manisa, Tarsus, Ordu and Van. These incidents were ratified by official sources: According to the Ministry of Interior between 20 April and 21 June, a total of 251 politically-related electoral incidents were directed mostly at the HDP (OSCE 2018: 10). The most controversial event of the elections took place on the 14 June, when a violent shooting incident in south eastern village Suruc between AKP campaigners and local shop-keepers, some of whom were HDP supporters, left four people dead and eight injured. Other media sources reported that in the eastern Anatolian province of Erzurum, four people were killed on polling day itself when a fight broke out in a polling station (*Guardian* 2018).

Under these circumstances it is perhaps not surprising that the 2018 electoral process attracted international criticism. The *Economist* described it as “the most unfair election in Turkey in decades” (Economist 2018e), and in a highly critical report, the Organisation for Security and Cooperation election observation mission documented violence largely targeted at the Kurdish HDP party:

During the campaign a number of incidents occurred, some violent. A significant number of attacks on party and campaign premises mainly affected the HDP, but also the CHP, Felicity and İYİ parties. The HDP informed the ODIHR EOM about detentions of 394 party activists, obstruction of campaign activities, police monitoring and harassment, and being subject to selective application of campaign rules. On 12 June the incumbent president stated that, according to information received from intelligence sources, those attending the CHP rally were HDP members. On 14 June the incumbent president instructed AKP members to identify HDP voters in their respective neighbourhood and “keep a close watch on them.” On 21 June the Minister of Interior warned CHP voters to refrain from voting for HDP or otherwise to bear responsibility for this. Such pressure on and intimidation of contestants and supporters contributed to an atmosphere of fear and raised concerns about their equality of opportunity and ability to campaign in a fair and free atmosphere as required by paragraph 7.7 of the 1990 OSCE Copenhagen Document. (OSCE 2018: 14-15).

In order better to understand patterns of electoral violence in Turkey, we first seek to identify regional variations in this phenomenon, with specific reference to Kurdish-populated East and South-East Anatolia, which has long been a focus of conflict (Toros 2002). This will provide the descriptive ground on which to test the above hypotheses as to the roles of region and partisanship in shaping blame attributions.

### **Data and Methods**

The data used to accomplish these tasks above are drawn from two original datasets: (1) a database of incidents of alleged electoral violence derived from media reports. This database,

the Database of Incidents of Electoral Violence in Turkey (DIEV-T), and (2) a face-to-face post-election population survey carried out by the authors following the June 2018 elections.

The DIEV-T covers all elections held between 1950 and 2018, though the data presented here are from 2018 only. Incidents are manually coded from Turkey's principal newspapers (at least four newspapers per election) based on a coding scheme that covers a range of types of both electoral misconduct and violence (issues related to the campaign, the legal framework, the planning and preparation of polling, registration, the verification of electoral results, training and information, voting operations and violence). The indicators identify alleged partisan perpetrators. The coding period covered the events of electoral misconduct and violence, which took place within 30 days before and after the election date. The DIEV-T Codebook can be found in the Appendix.

The post-electoral survey data are drawn from the Electoral Integrity in Turkey (EI-T) survey, carried out on a nationally representative random sample of 1,232 Turkish voters between 8 and 20 July, stratified by region. The fieldwork was carried by a professional public opinion company and involved face-to-face interviews in 12 NUTS-1 statistical areas, 30 provinces, and 98 districts; respondents were selected using a multi-stage, stratified, clustered random sampling procedure without replacement. The total response rate was approximately 24 per cent. The survey fielded a range of questions on electoral integrity and electoral violence, including a question that asked respondents to assess the likelihood that different actors might be involved in electoral violence: "Recently we hear news on problems related to elections, including attacks on ballot boxes, fights among political candidates, coercion on voters etc. In your opinion, how likely it is for the below mentioned actors to be involved in such kind of an activity? (1 Not likely at all, 5 Very highly likely)". Respondents were invited to answer this question in relation to each of the following categories of actor: "AKP supporter," "CHP supporter," "MHP supporter," "HDP supporter," "AKP official,"

“CHP official,” “MHP official” and “HDP official”, yielding eight scalar variables for each respondent.

Following presentation of descriptive data in the next section, the data are analysed via ordered logistic regression (given that the dependent variables are five-point scales) and correspondence analysis.

## **2. Results**

We start with a descriptive overview of electoral misconduct and violence during the 2018 election period based on the DIEV-T data, broken down by region, with East and South East Anatolia compared to the rest of Turkey. As shown in Figure 1, which graphs a number of common areas in which electoral norms may be violated, the data DIEV-T indicates that over this period, the East and South-East Anatolia region experienced a distinct pattern of electoral manipulation, including electoral violence. These data also show that electoral violence was the most common form of electoral irregularity in Turkey in post-2010 elections and that it was especially problematic in the ESEA region, which is characterised by its dense Kurdish population.

Figure 1 about here

Following Figure 1, Figure 2 breaks down electoral violence by sub-type. These include violence among party supporters, attacks on candidates, voter intimidation, defacing of campaign materials, attacks on party buildings or campaign offices, coercive forms of vote-buying, violent post-election protests, violence during party meetings, and attacks on ballot boxes and/or polling stations. In Turkey as a whole, violence among party supporters, attacks on candidates and voter intimidation are found to be the most common forms of electoral violence. This finding that concurs with the media and observer reports cited above.

Figure 2 about here



Figure 3 displays the break-down of electoral violence types by region. It is clear that patterns of electoral violence vary considerably across the country. Specifically, violence among party supporters and attacks on candidates are far more prevalent in ESEA, whereas in this region there are fewer attacks on party buildings and campaign offices, polling stations and ballot boxes, less coercive vote-buying and fewer post-election protests. The amplified attacks on party buildings at the non-ESEA regions require particular explanation since these attacks usually target pro-Kurdish political parties. That is why we see relatively fewer attacks on party buildings and campaign offices in the Kurdish majority provinces compared to Turkish majority provinces.

Figure 3 about here

Correspondence analysis (CA) confirms this assessment. Figure 4 is a CA ‘map’ in which the acute angle between blue violence points and red ESEA points indicates that these two observations are related.

Figure 4 about here

Figure 5 uses CA to map the subtypes of electoral violence in relation to the regions. As indicated in this ‘map’, the most common forms of electoral violence in the ESEA region are voter intimidation, attacks on candidates and violence among party supporters, shown in the lower left-hand portion of the map.

Figure 5 about here

In order to probe the regional dynamics of electoral violence perceptions, we use the 2018 survey data described above. We are interested in knowing what factors lead voters to believe that particular actors are responsible for electoral violence. We start with overall frequencies of the belief that different categories of people will be involved in electoral violence. Figure 6, which displays these data, paints a picture of a worryingly suspicious electorate that is willing to believe that relatively large proportions of their fellow citizens are

engaged in violent acts. The belief that partisans and officials of the pro-Kurdish HDP engage in violence is particularly common, even though the evidence to hand indicates that this party was more commonly a victim of violence in 2018.

Figure 6 about here

We next move onto the multivariate analysis of the determinants of blame attribution, with the belief that the actors listed in Table 2 are perpetrators of violence as dependent variables in a series of ordered logistic regression models. For these models, we use party identification and region (ESEA) as the independent variables of interest, coupled with ethnicity, education, age, gender and income as controls<sup>1</sup>.

The models shown in Table 1 confirm our hypothesis (H1) that attributions of blame for electoral violence should be shaped by partisan attachments. As the significant coefficients for party identification indicate, there is a strong tendency for adherents of all parties to believe that supporters and officials of rival parties engage in violence, and to be disinclined to believe this about supporters and officials of their own party and partisan allies. This tendency is especially pronounced among adherents of the governing AKP party, who are firmly disinclined to think that their fellow supporters or officials might be engaged in acts of violence, and also unwilling to believe that the adherents or officials of the allied MHP party might do so. AKP supporters appear very willing to attribute violence to supporters and officials of their traditional rival the CHP as well as to those of the pro-Kurdish HDP. A very similar pattern is shown in the coefficients for MHP support, indicating that supporters of the governing AKP's ally primarily took a lead from that party in choosing whom to blame for violence. CHP supporters, for their part, are less willing to attribute blame to their partisan fellows or to officials of their favored party, and more likely to blame the

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<sup>1</sup> Identification with a minor party or no party is the reference category in these models. We have checked the assumptions and performance of the models (model performances by AIC, the Nagelkerke R<sup>2</sup>, and assumptions with collinearity, normality, heteroscedasticity and non-normality of residuals). All of the results comply with accepted conventional levels.

AKP for violence. They are *not* more likely than other respondents to blame the HDP or MHP for violent acts, however. As with the supporters of other parties, HDP partisans are reluctant to attach blame for electoral violence to affiliates of their own party and likely to blame the AKP and MHP, but not more likely than others to attribute blame to the CHP. As far as the other variables are concerned, location in the ESEA region is associated with higher estimates of electoral violence on the part of all actors, save AKP supporters. The generally more violent reputation of that region appears to be borne out by the survey data. It is noteworthy also that in all models save that for HDP officials, ethnicity and income are associated with lower propensity to see groups in question as perpetrators of violence. In the case of HDP officials, however, the affluent are more likely to pin blame on them for violent acts. The other controls, age and gender, are hardly significant.

Table 1 about here

As clearly seen in Table 2, the HDP was widely blamed for electoral violence, despite lack of extensive evidence that this was an accurate view. In order to test H2 - that areas with dense Kurdish populations should be those in which outgroup blame attributions are intensified - we show in Table 2 a series of regression models of belief that the HDP was responsible for violence (with separate models for supporters and officials, as in Table 2), including interaction terms between party identification and the ESEA region. As hypothesised, belief among AKP supporters that HDP affiliates were responsible for acts of electoral violence was magnified by residence in the East and South East Anatolia region, as the positive and significant coefficients on the interaction terms in first two models show. HDP supporters in this region are also significantly less likely to believe their own officials (but not their supporters) had engaged in violent acts, as the negative coefficients on the interaction terms in the sixth model demonstrate. Interestingly, location in the ESEA region

has no significant impact on the blame attributions of supporters of the other two parties. Given that AKP and HDP supporters together make up approximately two-thirds of the electorate, these results thus largely confirm the hypothesis that there should be an interactive relationship between party identification and region of residence.

Table 2 about here

### **3. Discussion and conclusion**

When harm to the citizenry results from elections, voting can be said fundamentally to have undermined the core principles of democracy. Violent conflict is in many respects the worst flaw an election can have. Destructive of democratic representation as fraud and manipulation are, they rarely generate personal harm to individual citizens. When an election is marked by violence, by contrast, the result is typically a travesty of the democratic process and enduring harm to citizens. It is for this reason that it is so important to understand electoral violence in all its facets, from the drivers of this phenomenon to citizen attitudes towards and perceptions of it. Only by gaining a fuller and more detailed understanding of electoral violence can we hope to prevent it.

This paper has gone some way toward elucidating the dynamics of electoral violence in an under-studied case: Turkey. We have demonstrated that partisanship and region of residence together shape the way in which voters attribute blame for electoral violence. Even though the objective evidence at our disposal indicates that the pro-Kurdish HDP party was the principal victim of violence, supporters of other parties nevertheless blamed it for violence, especially in the ethnically mixed East and South East Anatolian region. These findings confirm the powerful role of partisanship and local context in shaping perceptions of covert behavior such as violence perpetration.

Future research could usefully probe the impact on electoral behavior of blame attributions. This paper has considered blame attributions as a dependent variable only, but their political relevance is largely in the effect they have on voting, which is an important piece in the puzzle of electoral violence. Though electoral behaviour and blame attribution in Turkey are both strongly conditioned by partisanship, the ways in which these factors interact with and relate to local context would be worth exploring in greater detail. There is considerable evidence that in many circumstances violence has a demobilising effect on those who fear it (Bratton 2008; Collier and Vicente 2012; Dercon and Gutierrez-Romero 2012; Gonzalez-Ocantos et al 2018; Gutierrez-Romero and LeBas 2018), though there is also evidence that this effect is conditional on a variety of factors, including country and partisanship (Bekoe and Burchard 2017; Burchard 2015). It would be of interest to study the role of blame attributions in conditioning demobilisation. It would also be of interest to consider the extent to which blame attributions shape voting behavior on the part of those who do make it to the polls. Finally, future data collection efforts would make it possible to probe in greater detail than has been possible here the causal mechanisms behind the phenomena observed, including the potential roles of regional polarisation and the direct experience of violence on blame attribution. The study of individual-level perceptions of and attitudes toward electoral violence is currently in its infancy, and much work remains to be done to unravel the complex ways in which experience and belief condition the impact of electoral violence on political outcomes.

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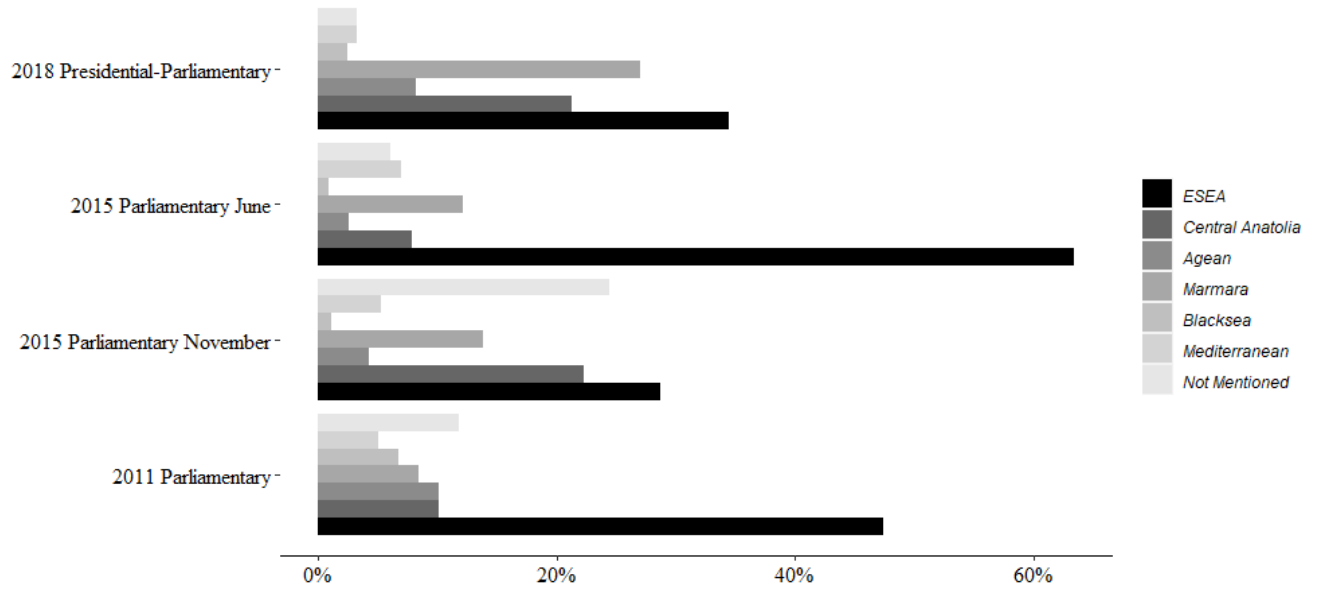
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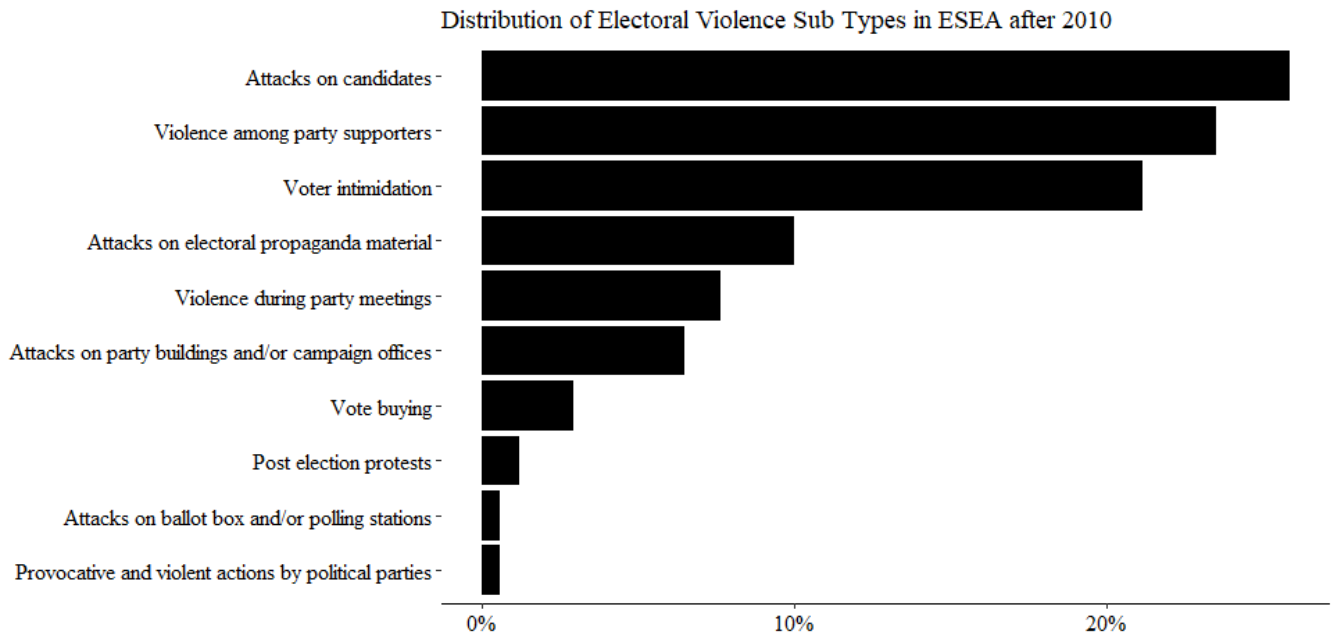
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**Figure 1**

Share of Violence News: Regions and Elections



**Figure 2**



**Figure 3**

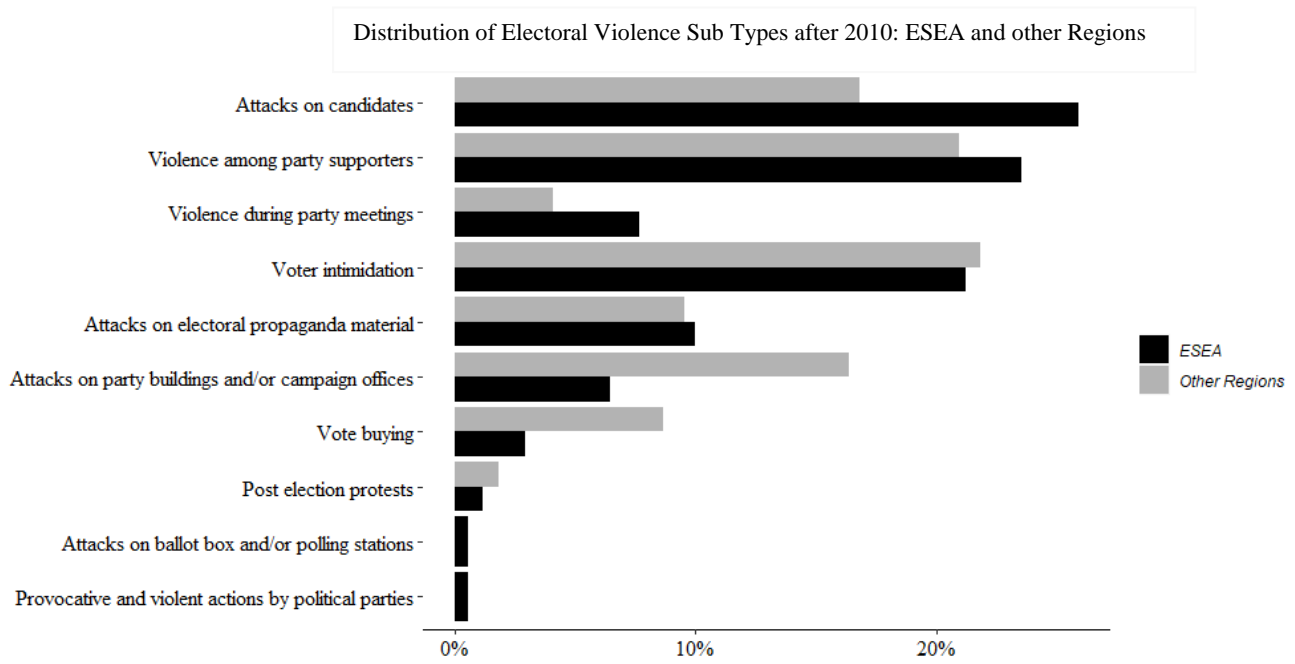


Figure 4

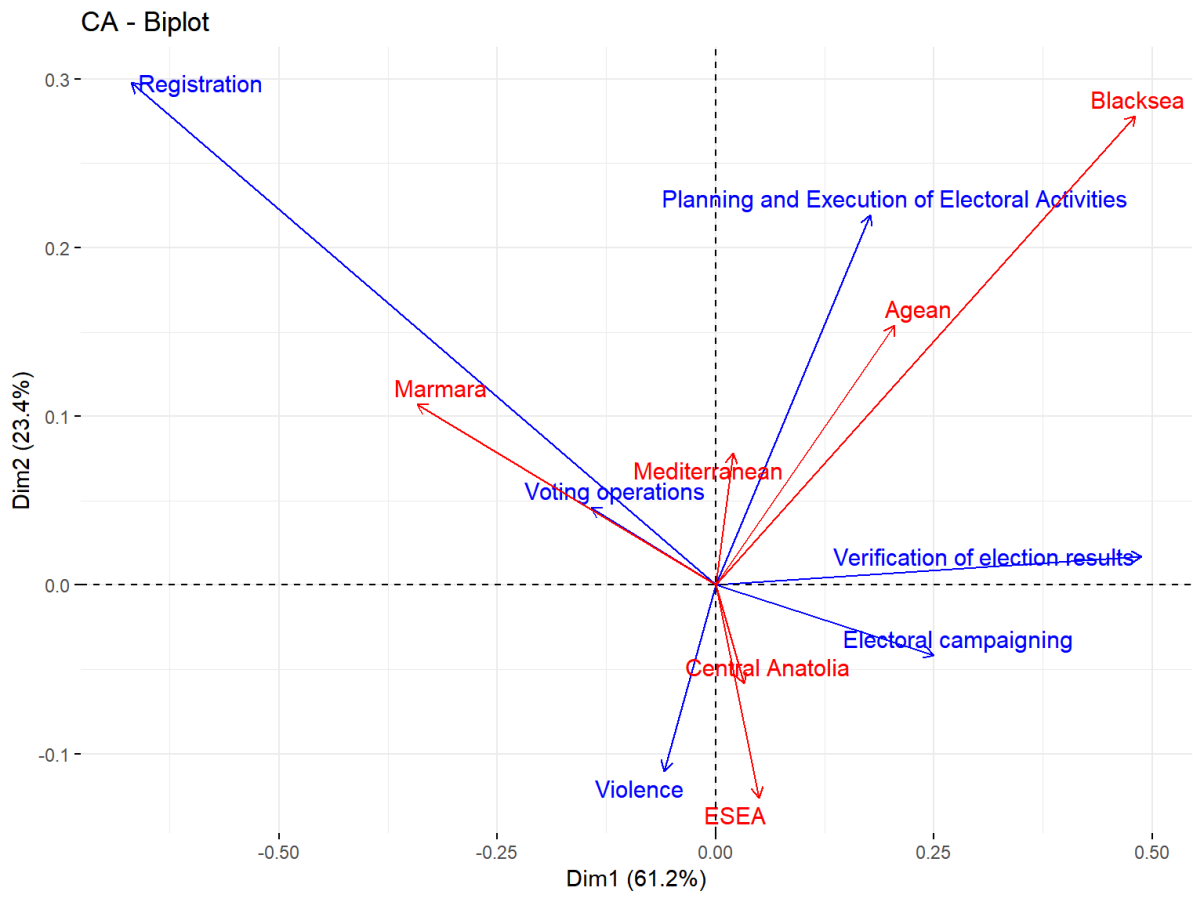
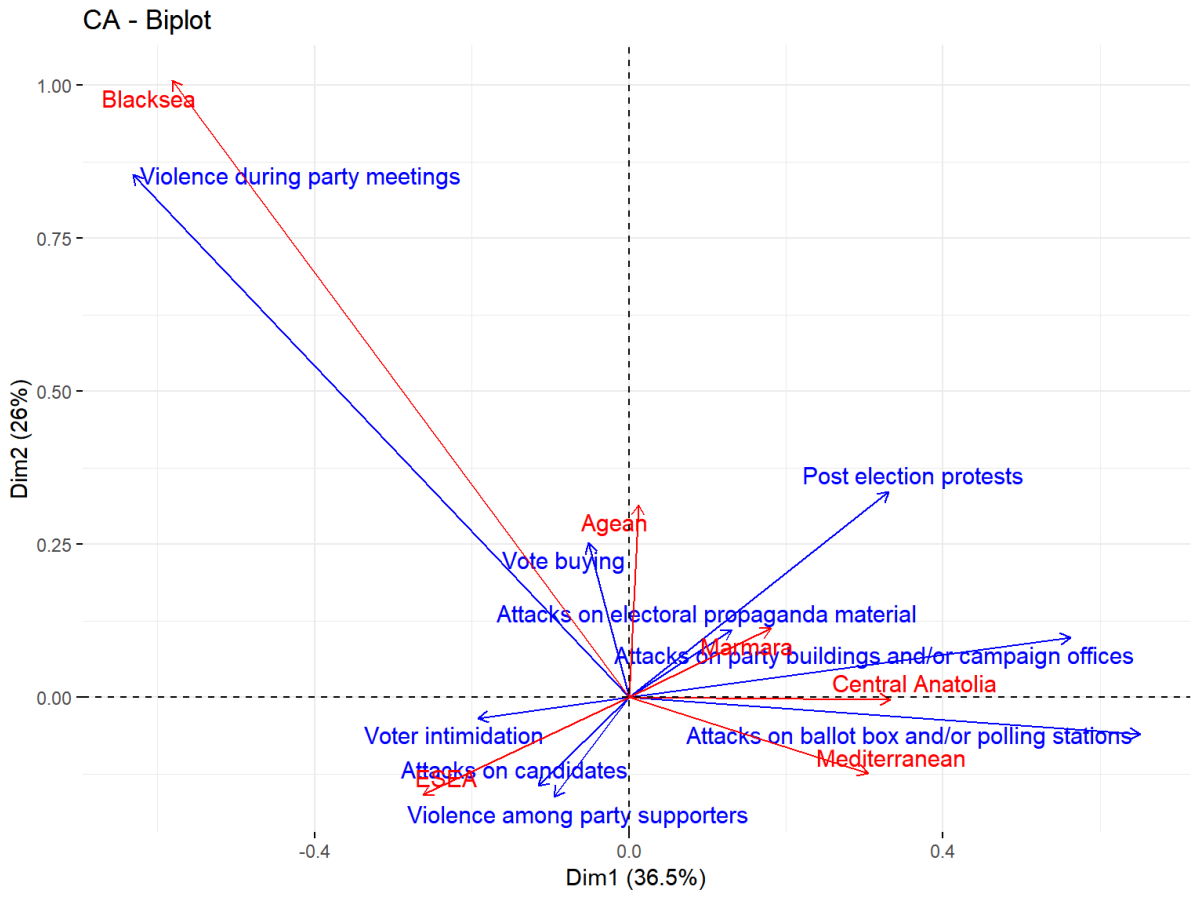


Figure 5





**Figure 6: Mean Belief that the Actor in Question Will Likely Be Involved in Electoral Violence**



**Table 1: Ordinal Logit Models of Blame Attributions for Electoral Violence with Interactions between Party Identification and ESEA Region**

<i>Predictors</i>	<b>AKP Voter</b>			<b>CHP Voter</b>			<b>MHP Voter</b>			<b>HDP Voter</b>		
	<i>Odds Ratios</i>	<i>std. Error</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>Odds Ratios</i>	<i>std. Error</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>Odds Ratios</i>	<i>std. Error</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>Odds Ratios</i>	<i>std. Error</i>	<i>p</i>
AKP ID	0.15	0.21	< <b>0.001</b>	3.86	0.19	< <b>0.001</b>	0.45	0.19	< <b>0.001</b>	1.78	0.19	<b>0.002</b>
CHP ID	4.71	0.22	< <b>0.001</b>	0.15	0.24	< <b>0.001</b>	2.32	0.21	< <b>0.001</b>	0.56	0.20	<b>0.003</b>
MHP ID	0.28	0.30	< <b>0.001</b>	1.66	0.28	0.074	0.17	0.33	< <b>0.001</b>	0.97	0.28	0.904
HDP ID	2.88	0.37	<b>0.004</b>	0.54	0.35	0.081	1.15	0.38	0.707	0.18	0.37	< <b>0.001</b>
Ethnicity (Kurdish)	1.69	0.23	<b>0.025</b>	0.62	0.20	<b>0.018</b>	1.84	0.21	<b>0.003</b>	0.48	0.21	<b>0.001</b>
Gender (Female)	0.99	0.13	0.967	1.11	0.12	0.400	1.00	0.12	0.988	1.01	0.11	0.947
Income	0.87	0.04	< <b>0.001</b>	0.93	0.03	<b>0.024</b>	0.85	0.03	< <b>0.001</b>	1.07	0.03	<b>0.039</b>
Age	0.99	0.01	0.205	1.00	0.00	0.827	0.99	0.00	0.217	1.00	0.00	0.400
Education	1.54	0.15	<b>0.005</b>	0.87	0.13	0.284	1.08	0.13	0.589	0.93	0.13	0.564
ESEA	0.82	0.42	0.628	2.95	0.42	<b>0.010</b>	1.17	0.41	0.698	1.25	0.43	0.602
AKP ID*ESEA	0.69	0.50	0.450	0.59	0.45	0.247	0.53	0.45	0.151	2.12	0.46	0.104
CHP ID*ESEA	0.58	0.58	0.349	0.45	0.68	0.236	0.94	0.58	0.913	1.52	0.57	0.467
MHP ID*ESEA	0.54	0.92	0.501	1.95	0.74	0.367	0.85	0.83	0.846	2.62	0.75	0.197
HDP ID*ESEA	1.73	0.59	0.353	1.00	0.56	0.999	2.87	0.59	0.072	0.42	0.65	0.183
Observations	1081			1066			1068			1068		
R <sup>2</sup> Nagelkerke	0.539			0.483			0.381			0.373		

Notes: Dependent Variable: How likely is a party voter would take part in violent incidents during the electoral period? ESEA stands for the East and Southeast regions of Turkey. Income and Education variables have 9 and 8 point scale intervals, respectively. Ordinal models, cut points removed from the table.

**Table 2: Ordinal Logit Models of Blame Attributions for Electoral Violence on HDP with Interactions between Party Identification and ESEA Region**

<i>Predictors</i>	<b>HDP Voter</b>			<b>HDP Official</b>			<b>HDP Voter</b>			<b>HDP Official</b>			<b>HDP Voter</b>			<b>HDP Official</b>		
	<i>Odds Ratios</i>	<i>std. Error</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>Odds Ratios</i>	<i>std. Error</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>Odds Ratios</i>	<i>std. Error</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>Odds Ratios</i>	<i>std. Error</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>Odds Ratios</i>	<i>std. Error</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>Odds Ratios</i>	<i>std. Error</i>	<i>p</i>
AKP ID	2.09	0.17	< <b>0.001</b>	1.95	0.17	< <b>0.001</b>	2.01	0.17	< <b>0.001</b>	1.85	0.17	< <b>0.001</b>	1.78	0.19	<b>0.002</b>	1.63	0.18	<b>0.008</b>
CHP ID	0.59	0.19	<b>0.005</b>	0.59	0.19	<b>0.004</b>	0.59	0.19	<b>0.005</b>	0.58	0.19	<b>0.004</b>	0.56	0.20	<b>0.003</b>	0.54	0.20	<b>0.002</b>
MHP ID	1.15	0.26	0.598	1.18	0.26	0.524	1.11	0.26	0.690	1.15	0.26	0.589	0.97	0.28	0.904	0.92	0.27	0.771
HDP ID	0.11	0.31	< <b>0.001</b>	0.09	0.32	< <b>0.001</b>	0.11	0.31	< <b>0.001</b>	0.08	0.33	< <b>0.001</b>	0.18	0.37	< <b>0.001</b>	0.18	0.38	< <b>0.001</b>
Ethnicity (Kurdish)	0.64	0.19	<b>0.016</b>	0.64	0.19	<b>0.021</b>	0.45	0.21	< <b>0.001</b>	0.41	0.21	< <b>0.001</b>	0.48	0.21	<b>0.001</b>	0.46	0.21	< <b>0.001</b>
Gender (Female)	1.02	0.11	0.885	1.10	0.12	0.397	1.01	0.11	0.930	1.08	0.12	0.488	1.01	0.11	0.947	1.07	0.12	0.553
Income	1.06	0.03	<b>0.056</b>	1.06	0.03	0.077	1.08	0.03	<b>0.016</b>	1.08	0.03	<b>0.019</b>	1.07	0.03	<b>0.039</b>	1.06	0.03	0.062
Age	1.00	0.00	0.431	1.00	0.00	0.831	1.00	0.00	0.495	1.00	0.00	0.714	1.00	0.00	0.400	1.00	0.00	0.801
Education	0.94	0.13	0.625	0.94	0.13	0.640	0.93	0.13	0.559	0.94	0.13	0.658	0.93	0.13	0.564	0.95	0.13	0.714
ESEA							2.02	0.17	< <b>0.001</b>	2.45	0.17	< <b>0.001</b>	1.25	0.43	0.602	1.41	0.43	0.419
AKP ID*ESEA													2.12	0.46	0.104	2.32	0.47	<b>0.052</b>
CHP ID*ESEA													1.52	0.57	0.467	1.76	0.57	0.321
MHP ID*ESEA													2.62	0.75	0.197	7.24	0.92	<b>0.031</b>
HDP ID*ESEA													0.42	0.65	0.183	0.18	0.74	<b>0.019</b>
Observations	1068			1067			1068			1067			1068			1067		
R <sup>2</sup> Nagelkerke	0.355			0.360			0.366			0.378			0.373			0.393		

Notes: Dependent Variable: How likely is an HDP Voter (Official) would take part in violent incidents during the electoral period? ESEA stands for the East and Southeast regions of Turkey. Income and Education variables have 9 and 8 point scale intervals, respectively. Ordinal models, cut points removed from the table.

## Appendix:

### A) DIEV-T Codebook

Content Element	Short Definition	Manifest or Latent	Measurement Level	Measurement Categories
<b>Newspaper</b>	Name of the newspaper which covers the news	Manifest	Nominal	Akit, Taraf, Birgün, Zaman, Posta, Yeniçağ, Sabah, Hurriyet, Cumhuriyet, Sözcü
<b>Election</b>	Election type	Manifest	Nominal	Local, Parliamentary
<b>Date</b>	Date of the news	Manifest	Interval	Recorded as the date of the incident
<b>Date Code</b>	Code between -31 to +31	Manifest	Interval	Code of the incident date: minus levels before the election day, plus levels after the election day
<b>Heading</b>	Heading of the news piece	Manifest	Text	Heading of the news piece
<b>Type</b>	Type of the material that the coded information is in	Manifest	Nominal	News, Columns
<b>Problem Type</b>	Types of electoral irregularities	Latent	Nominal	Legal Framework, Planning and Execution of Electoral Activities, Education and Training, Registration, Campaigns, Voting Day Problems, Registration of Electoral Results, Violence, Other problems
<b>Accuser identity</b>	Party id of the accuser	Manifest	Nominal	AKP, CHP, MHP, HDP, Others
<b>Accused identity</b>	Party id of the accused	Manifest	Nominal	AKP, CHP, MHP, HDP, Others

#### Coding example 1

CHP Ankara Metropolitan city candidate Mansur Yavaş: We have established a team of 40 observers who only traces the multiple registrations. Currently we have identified 58 thousand multiple voter registrations. For example, the same national id was registered both in Sincan and Çankaya.

(CHP Büyükşehir Belediye Başkan Adayı Mansur Yavaş: Sandık müşahitlerinden oluşan 40 kişilik bir ekip sadece mükerrer kayıtların takibini yapıyor. Şu anda tespit ettiğimiz 58 bin mükerrer kayıt var. Aynı kimlik numarası örneğin hem Sincan'da var hem de Çankaya'da.)

Content Element	Measurement Categories
<b>Newspaper</b>	Sözcü
<b>Election</b>	Local
<b>Date</b>	5 March 2014
<b>Date Code</b>	-25
<b>Heading</b>	Sandıkta hile korkusu [ <i>The Fear of Electoral Rigging</i> ]
<b>Type</b>	Columns
<b>Problem Type</b>	Planning and Execution of Electoral Activities,
<b>Sender of the Message</b>	CHP
<b>Addressee of the</b>	None

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**Message**

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## Coding example 2

HDP Leader Demirtaş said that the assaults on the HDP buildings are quite serious events and added: “we have retained our conventional wisdom [*against these incidents*]. A decision of confidentiality was issued on this investigation [*by the court*]. Why does one hide this investigation? ... all of the happened events point the AKP, not the HDP.




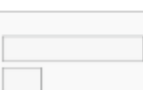
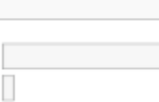
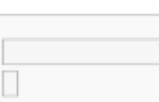
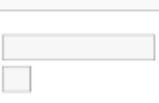
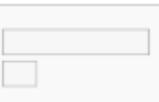


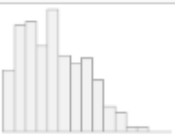

(Adana ve Mersin'de HDP İl Başkanlığı binalarına yönelik saldırıların çok vahim olaylar olduğunu kaydeden Demirtaş, "Biz sağduyumuzu koruduk. Dosya ile ilgili gizlilik kararı verildi. Bu soruşturma niye gizlensin ki? ... olup biten her şey AKP'yi işaret ediyor, HDP'yi işaret etmiyor.)

Content Element	Measurement Categories
Newspaper	Birgün
Election	Parliamentary
Date	22 May 2015
Date Code	-15
Heading	Demirtaş, Davutoğlu'nu yalanladı: Saldırıyı yapan DHKP-C'li değil [ <i>Demirtaş refutes Davutoğlu: Perpetrator is not a member of DHKP-C</i> ]
Type	News
Problem Type	Violence
Sender of the Message	HDP
Addressee of the Message	AKP

**B) Newspapers used in the analysis period and news distribution**

Newspaper	frq	percentage
Akit	95	4.71
Aydinlik	15	0.74
Cumhuriyet	648	32.11
Evrensel	510	25.27
Haberturk	43	2.13
Hürriyet	263	13.03
Karar	11	0.55
Milliyet	81	4.01
Ortadogu	52	2.58
Radikal	58	2.87
Sabah	21	1.04
Sözcü	118	5.85
Taraf	103	5.10
N	2018	100

### C) Descriptive Statistics of Variables Used in Models

No	Variable	Label	Stats / Values	Freqs (% of Valid)	Graph	Valid	Missing
1	f04a04 [haven_labelled]	F04A04 - People's Democracy Party Electorate -How likely is that this person would take part in violent incidents during the electoral period?	Mean (sd) : 3,4 (1,5) min < med < max: 1 < 4 < 5 IQR (CV) : 3 (0,4)	1: 236 ( 20,7%) 2: 86 ( 7,5%) 3: 218 ( 19,1%) 4: 230 ( 20,2%) 5: 369 ( 32,4%)		1139 (92,45%)	93 (7,55%)
2	f04b04 [haven_labelled]	F04B04 - People's Democracy Party Politician - How likely is that this person would take part in violent incidents during the electoral period?	Mean (sd) : 3,4 (1,5) min < med < max: 1 < 4 < 5 IQR (CV) : 3 (0,5)	1: 246 ( 21,6%) 2: 82 ( 7,2%) 3: 226 ( 19,9%) 4: 191 ( 16,8%) 5: 393 ( 34,5%)		1138 (92,37%)	94 (7,63%)
3	akp [numeric]		Min : 0 Mean : 0,5 Max : 1	0: 643 ( 52,2%) 1: 589 ( 47,8%)		1232 (100%)	0 (0%)
4	chp [numeric]		Min : 0 Mean : 0,2 Max : 1	0: 967 ( 78,5%) 1: 265 ( 21,5%)		1232 (100%)	0 (0%)
5	mhp [numeric]		Min : 0 Mean : 0,1 Max : 1	0: 1152 ( 93,5%) 1: 80 ( 6,5%)		1232 (100%)	0 (0%)
6	hdp [numeric]		Min : 0 Mean : 0,1 Max : 1	0: 1133 ( 92,0%) 1: 99 ( 8,0%)		1232 (100%)	0 (0%)
7	Kurdish [numeric]		Min : 0 Mean : 0,2 Max : 1	0: 1038 ( 84,2%) 1: 194 ( 15,8%)		1232 (100%)	0 (0%)
8	esea [numeric]		Min : 0 Mean : 0,2 Max : 1	0: 999 ( 81,1%) 1: 233 ( 18,9%)		1232 (100%)	0 (0%)
9	gender [haven_labelled]	Gender	Min : 1 Mean : 1,5 Max : 2	1: 623 ( 50,6%) 2: 609 ( 49,4%)		1232 (100%)	0 (0%)
10	income [haven_labelled]	Z05 - Can you please tell me which range best describes your total monthly household income?	Mean (sd) : 5,2 (1,9) min < med < max: 1 < 5 < 9 IQR (CV) : 2 (0,4)	1: 28 ( 2,4%) 2: 57 ( 5,0%) 3: 123 ( 10,7%) 4: 228 ( 19,8%) 5: 267 ( 23,2%) 6: 168 ( 14,6%) 7: 121 ( 10,5%) 8: 72 ( 6,3%) 9: 86 ( 7,5%)		1150 (93,34%)	82 (6,66%)
11	age [haven_labelled]	Year of birth	Mean (sd) : 38,7 (13,8) min < med < max: 18 < 38 < 87 IQR (CV) : 23 (0,4)	61 distinct values		1232 (100%)	0 (0%)
12	z01 [haven_labelled]	Z01 - What is the highest level of education you have completed?	Mean (sd) : 4,4 (1,5) min < med < max: 1 < 5 < 8 IQR (CV) : 2 (0,3)	1: 33 ( 2,7%) 2: 30 ( 2,4%) 3: 359 ( 29,1%) 4: 147 ( 11,9%) 5: 448 ( 36,4%) 6: 52 ( 4,2%) 7: 148 ( 12,0%) 8: 15 ( 1,2%)		1232 (100%)	0 (0%)

